

“Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Food System Renewal Manifesto”

Introduction

Making Australian cities and towns edible is an idea whose time has come. We live in an era of systemic crisis. On a daily level we hear stories of the inherent unsustainability of the many systems that govern our lives, politically and culturally.

The current food system is a visible manifestation of the unsustainability of our times. It is ‘normal’, for example, for basic food commodities to be transported thousands of kilometres from their place of production for processing and packaging, then shipped thousands of kilometres more to their final points of sale and consumption, imposing costs at every step. The food system is also highly non-resilient and subject to systemic disruption, as we are witnessing with the COVID19 pandemic of 2020.

The current food system is undermining the ecological and hydrological qualities of the planet, both directly and via its significant contribution to climate change. Biodiversity is threatened through land clearing and monocultural crops, soils are being eroded and degraded through industrial farming techniques, landscapes are being destroyed by the mining and processing required to produce agrichemicals, waterways are being depleted and polluted by over-extraction, and oceans are being acidified and polluted by agricultural byproducts. Meanwhile, approximately 40% of food produced globally goes to waste each year, intensifying greenhouse gas emissions and creating a further raft of problems.

The crisis is also manifest in social, physical and mental health impacts. Dietary-related ill-health is the biggest public health issue facing Australia. Our daily lives are relentlessly fast and busy, yet increasingly people report high levels of social isolation. More than ever before, we are disconnected from the social reality and ecology of our food system, and from each other.

It is in acknowledgement of this disconnection that we have come together to discuss ways that these problems can be addressed through necessary and urgent changes to the current food system. We believe that a vital part of a positive new system is sustainable urban agriculture.

We, the organisations that form the Steering Committee for the 3rd national Urban Agriculture Forum and first Urban Agriculture Month, call on all State, Federal and local governments to acknowledge and support a grassroots renewal of Australia's food system to:

1. **Acknowledge** the sovereignty, custodianship and wisdom of the First Nations of Australia, who understood this complex and beautiful land; and who fed themselves well from its bounties for tens of thousands of years before 1788
 1. **Acknowledge that** FOOD IS FUNDAMENTAL TO LIFE and the industrial food system is inconsistent with Australians' desire to enjoy a healthy and happy life, in connection with other people and nature; and satisfaction that the environment is cared for and nurtured now, and far into the future.
 2. **Recognise and celebrate that** sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture enhances ecological health and **recognise** the critical need for a food system that **builds** soil health, **increases** ecosystem resilience, **encourages** biodiversity and **regenerates** polluted waterways ("Regenerative Food System"):
 - 2.1. **To protect** our lands, waterways and ecosystems;
 - 2.2. To renew efforts to **connect** people with the source of their food;
 - 2.3. To **serve** the interests of all Australians, now and in the future;
 3. **Recognise and celebrate the leadership** that many Australian farmers at all scales and in all places – rural, regional and urban / peri-urban - are providing to help us transition to a Regenerative Food System that is ecologically sustainable, economically prosperous, and culturally connecting and healing.
 4. **Understand that** FOOD IS BASIC TO ECONOMIC PROSPERITY and the ways in which we engage with farmers, farm workers, market gardeners and other food producers, distributors, retailers, cooks and consumers is key to food system transformation.

5. **Recognise that FOOD IS CENTRAL TO CULTURAL VITALITY** and learn to **value** the importance of a food system in which all children know where their food comes from, appreciate different food cultures, and learn how to eat well so they can flourish and enjoy every day.

6. **Recognise that FOOD IS DEEPLY POLITICAL**, that it affects us all and therefore we must all have a voice in its current and future direction; and fundamentally that we need a food system that nourishes and sustains all of us, not one that makes us sick.

7. **Recognise** the critical role that sustainable **urban and peri-urban agriculture** plays in achieving an ecologically sustainable food system, to be achieved through;
 - 7.1. **Explicit** recognition of urban agriculture as a permitted use of land in residential, commercial and mixed-use zones in the Planning and Environment legislation in every State and Territory;
 - 7.2. **Comprehensive** mapping and permanent protection of all remaining high-value farmland within 100 kms of our major cities;
 - 7.3. **Creating** and resourcing of dedicated urban farms and market gardens, and associated public produce markets, throughout our towns and suburbs
 - 7.4. **Encouraging** every school to have a kitchen garden;
 - 7.5. **Instigating** food system literacy targets for all Australian school children;
 - 7.6. **Supporting** and expanding the handful of pilot programs connecting school children with farms; and
 - 7.7. **Creating** an urban agriculture fund to support community groups, not-for-profits and social enterprises working in the field.

8. **Embrace the expansion and support of urban and peri-urban agriculture** as an integral and fundamental cornerstone to achieving existing Federal, State and local government policy relating to health, wellbeing, and environmental protection, achieving these aims through:

- 8.1. **Amending** Planning legislation in all States and territories to make assessments of the health, wellbeing and environmental impacts of fast food retail outlets mandatory in planning approvals, and place the burden of proving no harm on applicants;
- 8.2. **Prohibiting** the opening of new fast food outlets [1] within 1 km of educational and / or healthcare facilities;
- 8.3. **Committing** to reducing the density of existing fast food outlets clustered around educational and healthcare facilities, recognising that lower socioeconomic areas are particularly vulnerable; and
- 8.4. **Developing** and resourcing a strategy to support market gardeners and farmers to transition to sustainable and regenerative forms of horticulture and agriculture.

[1] 'Fast food' is here defined as 'energy-dense, nutrient poor' and predominantly pre-processed and prepared foods in a take-away / drive-through restaurant: Prentice, A.M. and Jebb, S.A. 2003. Fast foods, energy density and obesity: a possible mechanistic link. Obesity Reviews 4(4), 187-194.